

## What We Deserve by edgy\_fluffball

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Babysitter Steve Harrington, Baking, First Kiss, Fluff and Angst, M/M, Protective Billy Hargrove, Steve Feels, Steve is a Mom, billy needs a hug, philosophical questions get answered

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Jonathan Byers, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington

**Relationships:** Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2018-01-14

**Updated:** 2018-01-14

**Packaged:** 2022-04-20 16:21:57

**Rating:** General Audiences

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 1

**Words:** 4,542

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

Initially, Steve had not thought he would have to think about philosophical questions whilst baking for the party, especially not when Max approaches him.

Something about her question keeps Steve on his toes.

## What We Deserve

‘Steve?’

‘In a second, I will be with you in just about a moment – shit, this is hard! What is it about?’

‘Uhm, are you sure you want me to talk with you whilst your head is in the oven?’

‘On second thought, you are right,’ Steve scrambled to his feet and straightened his shirt, ‘I’m on my feet and listening. What’s on your mind?’

Max stared at the kitchen floor, her hands stuffed into the pockets of her jeans, head hung low. She seemed concerned about something, the months since Halloween had given him enough time to get to know each of the kids and their little quirks and traits. Max, that he had learned, never contained her thoughts, but didn’t come to him for advice or help.

‘I have a question,’ Max looked back into the hallway, back to where the boys sat in front of the TV.

‘And you can’t ask them? They know more than me about most stuff anyway,’ Steve wiped his hands down his pants.

‘This I can’t talk about. At least not with the boys. You can maybe help me, you are a bit older and know stuff,’ she closed the kitchen door behind her, ‘Also – you might be experienced.’

‘Experienced? What exactly are we talking about?’ Steve crossed his arms over his chest and cleared his throat cautiously, ‘Because all of that sounds weird.’

‘No, not weird, just...I have this question and I don’t think I can ask the boys because they are – not good with that stuff,’ Max exhaled and looked up at Steve.

‘Well then, spit it out.’

She still seemed to think about the way to say whatever she wanted to say, she pushed a strand of her hair behind her ear, and rolled her shoulders. Steve leaned forward slightly, in expectation of her question.

‘Do all people get exactly what they deserve? I mean, is there a way to know that a person deserves it when they get treated...badly?’

Steve opened his mouth to say something, anything in response to the anxious expression on Max’s face. Halfway into actually forming words, he frowned and stopped. There was nothing he could think of that would make sense as an answer to it. Lacking the answer Max was waiting for with big eyes looking at him, Steve pushed himself on the countertop, next to the stove, and pointed next to himself.

‘Have a seat,’ he patted the surface.

‘On the countertop? Won’t Mrs. Henderson mind that?’

‘Max – I just cleaned the oven after the cookie debacle you and the boys hosted here. I can wipe down the countertop after we sat there, if you want me to. Oh, by the way, do you want a cookie, I got them out of the oven a few minutes ago...before I cleaned it, of course.’

Steve held out the bowl with the chocolate chip cookies they had produced. Max took one and stuffed it in her mouth. She still looked at Steve, big eyes searching in his for the answer to her question.

‘Max...any reason why you ask that?’

‘I’m just curious, you know? It’s an abstract question I was just thinking about, and the boys get funny when I think about stuff like that,’ Max sneaked her hand past Steve to grab another cookie.

‘Doesn’t sound like them, they are all philosophical usually. Dustin loves discussing this deep shit,’ Steve scratched his head and stared at his stocking-footed feet, ‘in fact, he’s obsessed with it.’

‘Yes, but I came to you because you are older than us. I thought you might just know the answer. Plus, you are some kind of authority to us by now.’

‘Authority?’ Steve could not prevent a snort, ‘You guys boss me around whenever you get the chance.’

Max rolled her eyes at him.

‘But if you really want an answer from me, I can try and give you one. Because...in the end it’s easy to answer.’

‘Really?’ Max stopped chewing her cookie to look up at him, frowning at him doubtfully, ‘Just a moment you called it deep shit.’

‘Yah, turns out I was wrong. Is that so surprising? – Don’t answer that, please,’ Steve sighed, ‘Now, for the answer: No.’

‘What?’

‘No, people don’t always get what they deserve and no, there’s no way to know if they get what they deserve. It’s one of these things, you know? I know it is incredibly unfair but people are mean to each other without reason. You can be the nicest person on earth – or try to be, at least – and someone will come along and be horrible to you because they had a bad day or lost their job or had problems at home, and then they project all their problems onto you and try to make you feel bad as much as they do. It’s shitty and a mean thing to do... Listen, Max, I might not be the best person to speak about that with you...’

‘No, you’re helping, actually,’ Max smiled weakly, ‘So, you would say that...jerks might not be jerks at heart and people that get treated poorly...are sometimes nice people who just drew the short end of the stick?’

Steve nodded slowly, ‘I guess so...’

Max fidgeted next to him. Her hand hovered over her leg, tapping out a rhythm on her jeans; her face was scrunched up in a frown, and her feet kicked back against the cabinet door under the countertop. Steve could see there was more to it, but didn’t dare asking. Max worried her lower lip with her teeth and stared back down to the ground again.

‘So, which group does Billy belong to?’

Steve choked on the cookie he had been nibbling at.

‘Uhm, Billy?’

‘Yes, my stupid big step-brother, you remember?’

‘Yah, uhm – hard to forget that guy...,’ Steve cleared his throat, ‘is he the reason you asked me about... deserving what you get?’

Max flinched, ‘Can I have another cookie?’

Steve held out the bowl for her to take, ‘Sooo, it was? What’s up with you, Max, you can tell me! There is something on your mind and it worries you. Can I help you with anything?’

Max hopped down from the counter, taking the cookie bowl with her, ‘I’ll get these to the boys.’

‘Hey, I just offered to listen to –‘

‘Yah, I got that. And thank you, Steve. Really, thank you. You helped a lot,’ Max grinned at Steve, opened the kitchen door and left him sitting on the counter.

‘Oh this is just great,’ Steve continued to mutter under his breath whilst cleaning the rest of the kitchen.

He took the remaining party home after Jonathan had dropped by to pick up Will. The back seat was cramped, since Dustin insisted on joining everyone else in the backseat to keep them entertained. First up was Mike, then Lucas. After the boys had disappeared in their houses, the inside of Steve’s BMW felt even more restrictive.

It wasn’t often that Steve took Max home as well, mostly when Billy was occupied, meaning he had a date in the evening. Even then, Steve had to personally call the Hargrove household to ask either Susan or Neil Hargrove if he could drive Max home. Billy had cornered him once at school, instructing him about how to go about picking up and dropping off his step-sister in the most intense, Billy-like way.

Max and Dustin whispered in the backseat whilst Steve drove through Hawkins. He tried to focus on the street but Max's words still stuck to his thoughts.

'Hey, Max,' he pulled up in front of the Hargrove home, 'you have two minutes until the curfew.'

'Yes, I know,' Max looked out of the window, 'thank you for today. Thanks for the ride.'

'Sure, Max. Hey – remember that I am here if you want to talk about...anything.'

Max got out of the car, waved back at them and made her way up to the house where the door was opened for her. Steve caught a glimpse at Billy standing in the yellow light pouring out from the inside. He had his shoulders pulled almost up to his chin, fists pushed into his pockets. Max disappeared in the hallway, the door closed behind her and Dustin climbed to the front of the car.

'Can we...go now?'

'Hm? Yay, sure, going now.' Steve started the car and drove off.

Dustin stared at him all the way back to his house. He didn't move his head even a centimetre until the car stopped again. Steve motioned for him to get out but Dustin still looked at him.

'What was that about Max just now?'

'Nothing. Look, your mother is back home, see you tomorrow,' Steve motioned towards the house, 'Come on, man, I want to go home as well. Please do tell your mother that I cleaned the oven after you left a battle field!'

'She's just gonna insist on paying you,' Dustin slammed the car door shut and ran off, skipping over the lawn towards the house.

Steve drove home, parked and went upstairs, he flopped down onto the bed, pulled his shirt over his head and buried himself under the pillows and blankets. At some point he ended up staring at his nightstand and the alarm clock in it. Its illuminated display painted a

pattern on his bed that he could follow with his eyes. He was still thinking about Max and her question. She had looked at him as if she needed the answer, urgently. And in hindsight, he wasn't even sure if his answer had been all that helpful.

Did people get what they deserved? He struggled under the blanket, trying to find a comfortable position on the mattress. Something had been off about Max's question, especially with the follow up question concerning Billy.

Steve fell asleep with his brows furrowed, one leg stretched out under the covers, the other one dangling over the edge. He had one pillow pulled over his head, another one pushed under his back to relieve the slight saddle back his father had diagnosed him with, insisting on the pillow ever since.

It was in front of the mirror, whilst he did his hair, that a thought crossed his mind. The hairspray can tumbled to the ground, Steve dove to catch it and hit his head on the sink. Rubbing his temple and cursing like a sailor he leaned against the wall and looked at his reflection. A bump formed on his forehead, skin was bruising and a throbbing pain shot through his head – all in the time until he pulled into the school parking lot and got out of the car.

There were a few students around but Steve just ducked his head and entered the building. He got to his locker before someone noticed the blue goose egg on his forehead. Unfortunately for him, it was Billy Hargrove who slammed his locker door shut and leered at him.

'Now look at you, Harrington – who's beaten you up?'

'Get lost, Hargrove,' Steve stuffed his books into his bag and turned away, not in the mood to look at Billy and be reminded of both Max's question and the way the boy had looked the night before..

'No seriously, what happened? Who hurt you? Which asshole did that to you? Do you need anything, that doesn't look like you cooled it –'

'Hargrove – what on earth are you going on about?' He walked down the hallway, contemplating actively looking for Nancy and Jonathan to throw Billy off.

‘Come on, dude, someone decked you and I wanna know who, so I can –‘

‘– can do what, Billy, congratulate him?’ Steve stopped and turned around to face Billy, ‘I bet you would have the time of your life!’

‘Harrington, you are one dramatic dude. I was about to offer to deck him too,’ Billy still grinned at him.

Steve couldn’t fight off the snarl in his voice, ‘Oh don’t hold yourself back, my bathroom sink will gladly fight you.’

He turned back around and left Billy behind. Not hearing a single word from him left him with a satisfied feeling in his stomach that accompanied him through the first three periods. Steve knew he couldn’t avoid Billy forever, not with basketball practice in the afternoon. Between the lessons and practice he sat on the hood of his car with Nancy and Jonathan, debating the ideas Mike and Will had come up with for Dustin’s birthday.

‘They want to do a treasure hunt campaign?’ Steve shook his head, ‘Why not go outside and have a real treasure hunt?’

‘Are you volunteering to organize the whole shebang?’

‘Yes, Nancy, I think I am, actually,’ Steve crossed his arms over his chest, leaning back slightly, ‘I mean, you could help if you wanted to.’

Jonathan sat down next to him, putting the camera he had held in his hands in its bag, ‘He’s staring at you. Again.’

‘Who is?’ Nancy tried to look past her boyfriend and frowned, ‘Billy Hargrove?’

Steve sighed and rested his head in his hand, ‘I think I provoked him earlier. Max was a bit weird yesterday and I might have thought too much about it until I got to the point where I started to feel like I had understood the problem. I didn’t, as it turns out. At least not completely but I only found that out when I stood in front of him earlier.’



'You have basketball today, don't you?' Nancy looked up to the school where Billy still leaned at a wall and stared in their direction.

Steve nodded, his face pulled into a grimace, 'Yah, I guess you can have my records if I don't make the day, Jonathan.'

'Don't awfulize it, I don't think he'll kill you,' Jonathan nodded back up to the school.

Steve looked past him, prepared to slide off the car if he was spotted. But Billy seemed to have other things I mind and none of them appeared to be making Steve pay for looking, staring at him. Instead, his look was more forlorn than angry or wild. This Billy didn't look like his normal self, Steve thought, and more than that, his earlier behaviour had been anything but what he was used to deal with. An insecure Billy was unpredictable enough to worry Steve, not being able to tell in what mood Billy was, posed the immediate danger of mood swings and sudden outbursts. Their earlier interaction still stuck to him, making him feel like he was missing something big.

'Alright then, basketball practice,' Nancy patted his shoulder and jumped off the car, 'You don't want to be late. Are you ready, Jonathan? Your mother is expecting us.'

They made their way towards Jonathan's car, arms snaked around each other's waists. Steve let his gaze follow them until they drove off. Without them by his side he felt the strange feeling of the loneliness again, that enveloped him whenever they and the kids were not around or didn't need him. Without them, without his tasks to fulfil, he felt empty. What other thing could he do but think and over-think anything coming to his mind.

'Hey, Harrington – ready for practice?'

He was snapped out of his thoughts by Billy Hargrove plopping down on the hood of the Beemer, startling both the car and Steve. When he looked to the side he stared right into Billy's enquiring eyes, not budging, not blinking.

'What the hell is up with you, pretty boy? You are off your beaten path today,' he leaned closer, a cloud of smoke and cologne offending

Steve's nose, 'Is it because of that bruise? Because if anyone touched you –'

'We already clarified that, Hargrove. I banged my head on the bathroom sink, no reason to get all protective over...over what, exactly? You have never shown me any kind of concern, so why now? What's your deal?' Steve brushed his hair back and hopped off the car.

The look Billy threw him couldn't be described as anything but hurt. It seemed like something had been wiped off his face that had been there before, the guards were down. Steve knitted his brows together, not willing to be stared down by Billy Hargrove.

A thought crossed his mind. He got his gym bag out of the trunk, rounded the car and crossed his arms over his chest. Billy fixated him, his look wary.

'Is there a way to know whether someone deserves what they get,' Steve thought back to Max seeking him out in the Henderson's kitchen, 'do you know who asked that yesterday? Your little sister – and now I think I understand why she asked that. Do people always get what they deserve, that was her second question. And there are just two possible interpretations. I might not be the best writer but I know how to analyse a situation.'

Billy seemed to falter a bit as Steve came up close to him. He recalled Max's face, the silent hope in her eyes and the disappointment when he had said that people would always treat each other badly. There was something glinting in the corner of Billy's eyes that Steve could only define as anxious anticipation.

'I told her that not all people get what they deserve, that people are mean and good people get pushed over the edge until they break. I think Max was hoping for me to tell her that people are uncomplicated...I am sorry for having disappointed her. What I didn't think of saying is that the people who think that they deserve the bad thing happening to them are wrong. They don't deserve it, I wanted Max to know that, can you tell her?'

Billy swallowed dry and nodded. He slid off the car as well, grabbed

his bag and ran off towards the gym. Steve followed slower, he could sense that Billy didn't wish for them to arrive at the same time. It would cause questions from all sides because the whole school knew that Steve Harrington and Billy Hargrove didn't get along.

They still clashed during practice, Billy walked all over Steve with a determined, set expression. The only difference were the looks he threw Steve after each attack, apparently assuring he was okay after hitting the floor or crashing into him again and again. The outstretched hand helping Steve up stayed, there was no more pushing him back down or verbal taunting. Billy seemed to be collected, prepared to deal with whatever the day would bring.

'Think about it,' Steve slung his bag over his shoulder and looked back at Billy, 'and please tell Max what I said earlier. It seemed pretty important to her to know. See you around, Hargrove.'

He turned around and left the gym humming a tune he had picked up from the kids. Supposedly, it was the theme of one of the video game the kids played when they were together. He couldn't even tell which one it was because often enough he mixed the songs up into one melody. With his only plans of the day being a visit at Hopper's he could relax in the car on the way there. His meetings with the Chief took place to discuss his future and explore his options in the police force. Hopper showed him the ropes of what the job comprised to help him find out if being a cop was something he could work with. None of the kids knew about it, he had told Dustin something about additional training, and since the kids did not care for sports, no one doubted his lie.

After his weekly meet ups he usually drove home, cooked something small for himself and settled down in front of the TV. Most times he fell asleep on the couch and woke up with an aching back and stiff neck. Only once his parents had come home to find him sleeping in the living room, on other nights when they were home, they didn't pay any attention to him and what he did downstairs. But then again, they were not home most of the time, allowing Steve to do whatever he wanted once he was at home. He had tried almost everything, drinking until he passed out on the bathroom floor, late-night

swimming, blasting his music at full volume and dancing around manically.

His parents never realized what happened during their absence. Even, when he left traces, empty booze bottles and pizza boxes, they would just walk past it and tell him to remember to do his homework. At some point after the pool incident it all had lost the excitement it had possessed before. Steve still felt like the kids had rubbed off on him, making him a different person altogether.

He unlocked the front door, threw his gym bag into the general direction of the laundry room and flopped down onto the couch. There was another portion of lasagne in the fridge, Steve thought about eating right after he would rest for a bit.

Resting turned into sleeping before long. Steve knew he wasn't doing his body any good by falling asleep face down on the sofa again, his spine would be protesting. But this didn't bother him in the exact moment his eyes closed and his dangling limbs sank to the floor next to the couch.

That was until a muffled knock woke him back up.

Steve lifted his head from the cushion beneath it and looked towards the door.

'Who's there?'

There was no answer, instead the door was opened and Steve remembered that he had meant to lock it when he had come home. One moment later, Billy Hargrove stood in the hallway, his face distorted in anger. Not the kind of anger that had led to Steve receiving a beating; the kind of anger one expressed when unsatisfied with their own self. Apparently, Billy felt this anger and discontent as well. Steve yawned and pointed to one of the armchairs.

'I guess you had a chat with Max?'

Billy crossed the room and sat down, curling up in his seat. He pulled his legs up, cuddling them close to his upper body. His look was directed towards the ground, not meeting Steve's questioning gaze.

‘Did you talk to Max? Have you told her –’

‘It made her cry. It genuinely made her cry, Harrington! I couldn’t help her with anything, she was crying and I was trying to comfort her – but I couldn’t. As soon as I did, she was clinging to me and hung from my neck. Why would she do that, Steve?’

‘What, hug you? Because she cares about you, believe it or not. I guess she was wondering whether...you could be helped. I don’t want to impose, but I guess from her questions and demeanour that something is going on with you that I couldn’t understand. Don’t interrupt me!’

Billy, who had opened his mouth and turned to face him, sank back into the armchair, tugging on his legs again. Steve cleared his throat and scratched his head.

‘Anyway, I kind of guessed what happens in your home. Max hinted at it a few times but in the end I might not be as dumb and slow as many might think I am. It doesn’t matter, you know?’ Steve sighed and looked at the other boy, ‘What I told Max applies to you, doesn’t it? She was worried you might be...lost, I guess. And what I told her, is also for you to know. You might not deserve what happens to you and I think you need a reminder every now and then. You are not a bad person, you...have bad things happen to you, and it influences you to forget who you are. The anger is part of you by now, am I not right? I guess it is hard to remember that not everyone meets you with rejection and abuse.’

He plucked a few crumbs from his sweater, the need for the sofa to be brushed off once in a while seemed to grow with every meal he had in the living room. For the time being it seemed cleverer not to look at Billy who didn’t seem to move or make a sound after his harangue.

‘What do you know about rejection,’ Billy’s voice sounded raspy, a bit croaky even, and he set his feet back to the ground, ‘Who has King Steve been rejected by, hm?’

Steve met his cocky look and shrugged, ‘There was a moment when a new student came to Hawkins and the people I called my friends

turned their backs to me. I felt alone, does that count?’

Billy looked at him as if he had disappeared and been replaced with an imposter. Something in his eyes sparked, realisation, Steve thought. He traced a loose string down his shirt, pulling on it for test purposes. A small sound had him look up again. Billy stood, one hand buried in his pocket, the other one fumbling with his hair.

‘Listen, I appreciate you sticking up for me, Harrington. I guess you’re as broken as I am – in a different way. Still, you can’t change anything. There is nothing you can do to make everything alright, better or make the shitty stuff disappear.’

‘You’re right,’ Steve stood up as well, ‘I can’t make it go away, I can’t change you or the people that treat you badly – I can make it easier, however.’

Emboldened by Billy’s curious look, he stepped closer, took his hand and let his thumb trace a pattern on the back of his hand. He smiled a sad little smile, holed up in the corner of his mouth as he lifted Billy’s hand up to his mouth and pressed his lips on his fingertips.

An amicable silence lay over them, at least for a moment. Then, Billy’s mouth pulled into a leering grin. He looked at their joined hands and huffed out a breath.

‘Are you going to start kissing me better now, pretty boy?’

‘I guess so,’ Steve smiled and leaned forward.

The kiss they shared tasted like iron and salt because Billy’s teeth clashed with Steve’s lips, scraping the skin off of them, drawing blood. He pressed his body up against Steve’s, holding him tight enough to press the air out of his lungs. His devouring mouth sucked on his lips, not letting him go. His lips wandered, tickling Steve’s throat and marking him as his own.

They broke apart, both panting heavily. Steve squeezed Billy’s hand that he still held in his own, and touched their foreheads together. For a moment they breathed the same air, sharing the intimate moment and each other’s closeness.

‘I must ask though,’ Steve whispered, feeling as if a normal tone could disturb the peace enveloping them, ‘did it help? In any way?’

He felt a pinch to his backside. When he looked at the other boy in annoyance, the shiteating grin was back on Billy’s face.

‘Well, pretty boy, you might just get my permission to kiss better wherever I am hurting from now on.’

**Author's Note:**

Hit me up on Tumblr: @edgy-fluffball